

FEEDBACK & EVALUATION

Giving Feedback

One of the most important aspects of a person's ability to learn a new task is feedback. Whether it comes from you or a volunteer supervisor, it's imperative that the process exists to make your volunteers feel valued and help them succeed in their roles. There are two generally agreed upon forms of feedback:

Reinforcement: Identifies desirable traits and encourages the individual to continue with these in the future.

Corrective: Identifies areas that need improvement and provides suggestions on how to improve the task at hand.

While giving reinforcement is usually easier to do, most studies agree with the fact that corrective feedback is indeed important for the learning of a new task. Methods of delivering feedback vary, with common approaches including the BOOST and EEC models:

Balanced: Ensure that your feedback includes both points of development and strength.

Observed: Focus on what you have observed and not what you may think happened.

Objective: Don't bring in personality traits; you want to highlight the issue with the behaviour, not the person.

Specific: Back up your comments with specific examples of the behaviour.

Timely: Your follow-up on the issue must be timely and happen shortly after the activity.

Or:

Evidence: Ensure that you are providing specific examples of the behaviour without focusing on the personality of the person.

Effect: Describe what effect the person's action had on the overall task at hand.

Change: Offer guidance on how to change the person's actions. It's best to encourage them to offer solutions instead of imposing your own ideas.

A few important things that both these models take into account are the ideas of providing specific details of the inappropriate behaviour involved and focusing on the behaviour itself and not the person. You most certainly do not want your emotions to contribute to your discussion with the person involved if you want to resolve the issue at hand smoothly. These models also contain some very useful skills utilized in conflict-resolution strategies:

- Focus on the problem, not the person.
- Point out specific details surrounding the issue, not hearsay.
- Encourage working together to find a solution.

Empowering your supervisors with these methods of providing feedback will give them comfort and confidence while working with volunteers in the future. Any issues that arise need to be well documented and followed up on by you if the situation is not resolved at the time.

When working with volunteers, supporting them with positive reinforcement is equally as important as following up with corrective feedback. This reinforcement will encourage your volunteers to take on leadership roles in the future as you continue to build their confidence and their responsibilities. This is also an opportunity to increase the diversity of your volunteer leadership, which will in turn create a more inclusive environment.

Getting Feedback

Delivering appropriate feedback cannot happen without establishing a proper process. Ensuring that proper feedback channels are established for your volunteer program will foster an open and inviting environment. It's equally as important to include as many feedback channels as possible, so that all volunteers feel comfortable providing it. Different forms include:

- Direct reporting to the supervisor on shift
- Supervisor reports completed at the end of each shift
- Face-to-face meeting with the volunteer department
- Telephone number that volunteers can call anytime with questions, comments, concerns
- Email address where inquiries are answered in a timely manner
- Group feedback sessions
- A quick anonymous survey

All of the above channels may not have the highest impact when administered individually, but combining your efforts and offering multiple channels for feedback will encourage volunteers to voice their comments and concerns in a way that is most comfortable for them. Be aware that some communities prefer to avoid direct confrontation or criticism—you may need to find ways to reassure these volunteers that their opinions are valued and encouraged.

As mentioned above, one of the most important factors in gathering feedback and evaluating performance is time. You want to make sure that any concerns with performance or any praise that is passed along is responded to in a timely manner. It can be confusing to approach someone with praise or performance issues weeks after the event occurred.

If you are relying on a supervisor to provide you with their notes, make sure that they understand the timeline for submitting their response. In order to streamline the reporting process, create a report template (Appendix O) that you expect supervisors to fill out. Include an outline of what you are looking for when it comes to the report, and to ensure that the comments you receive are useful, it's worth adding what you are looking for specifically in terms of feedback (i.e. how a volunteer interacts with customers or how they work in a team environment, etc.). Listing specific examples of why someone is excelling in a role is crucial for developing future opportunities for them. This feedback will ensure that the volunteer's skills and personality fit the roles you may ask them to fill, or may help develop other roles that never existed in the past.

You can gather performance feedback about a volunteer time and time again, but if there is not a streamlined process for how this feedback is captured, there is hardly a point of gathering it in the first place. Investing in volunteer management software, or sourcing free software, can really make a huge difference to your organization. Make sure that the software you look into can store performance feedback notes, in addition to other obvious assets like scheduling shifts and organizing resources.

Gathering anonymous input from a volunteer's perspective about the volunteer program will give you a glance into the overall experience. Developing a short survey (Appendix P) to administer at the end of a volunteer term will provide you with the tools to re-examine and improve your efforts. You especially want to evaluate any new initiatives you introduced into the program to gauge how effective your efforts were for volunteers. Subtle nuances can be most important in helping someone feel welcomed and appreciated. Talk to your volunteers, get their feedback and integrate it into your processes and procedures.

If you rely on supervisors to deliver training material or to provide on-site support, gathering opinions on the method of training and support volunteers experienced is crucial to ensure that the level of volunteer satisfaction is consistent across your organization. Again, time is of the essence with feedback surveys. The survey needs to be administered in a timely manner when the event finishes or when the volunteer has completed the task in order to receive the most accurate feedback.

It's impossible to be in many places at once, so ensuring that feedback is being given and gathered via different streams is important in creating an overall picture of your volunteer's experience.



Conflict Resolution

When working with many different types of personality and work ethic, conflicts are naturally bound to arise. Developing a planned approach to conflict management and training your staff and supervisors, using some quick and easy tips to resolve issues, will create a better workplace for both parties.

A great way to start minimizing conflict is to look forward to see how conflict may arise, and then take the steps to mediate potential conflicts right away. A great tool from Volunteering Queensland Inc. highlights some problems that may arise with volunteers and how to avoid such situations:

Problems with volunteer performance occur most often when:	How to avoid this situation:
What is required of the person in the job is unclear	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have clear job descriptions
People's contributions are not recognized	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use formal and informal ways of recognizing volunteers • Reward volunteers individually and as a group
People do not know when they are not performing well	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give regular honest feedback • Conduct regular performance appraisals/reviews
There are no opportunities for training and development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide regular training sessions • Utilize guest speakers to talk about various topics • Consider supporting volunteers in gaining qualifications
Managers do not take the time to listen and understand their particular and changing experiences and needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schedule time to listen to volunteers • Ensure volunteers know when the "best" time to approach is • Gather regular feedback about various aspects of the program
A person does not adapt well or cope well with change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give plenty of notice about upcoming changes, wherever possible • Ensure volunteers understand why the change is necessary • Give support and encouragement
A person does not have the knowledge or skills to do the job	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have clear job descriptions, and clear selection and application processes • Consider using "skilled" or "professional" volunteers
There are not the resources or equipment necessary to do the job	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only put volunteers in a role if you have the required resources



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It's a fact: most people do not enjoy conflict. Providing tips on how to approach a situation if one arises ensures that volunteers and staff can resolve things effectively and can leave the situation feeling good. Here are some common tips on how to approach a conflict:

- If tempers flare, take a step back and walk away until you're calm. Leave your emotions out of the discussion.
- Make sure you maintain eye contact. You do not want to look distracted or uninterested in the discussion.
- Focus on the problem with the behaviour; do not attack the person. Bring up specific details of the issue and how it impacted you or the operation of task.
- Communicate your feelings clearly and calmly; do not assign blame to anyone involved.
- One person should not be right or wrong. Everyone should leave the discussion feeling like they contributed, so work together to come up with a solution. When only one person's needs are met, the situation is not solved and the problem will continue.
- Listen to the other person without interrupting. Often people just need a little time to vent, and appreciate being heard.
- Repeat key details of the other person's account so they know they are being heard.
- Never jump to conclusions. Wait until you are aware of both sides of the story when coming up with a solution.
- Thank the other person involved. You do not want to end the discussion with someone storming off, still angry. Take the time to deescalate the situation and sincerely thank them for bringing their grievances forward.

A lot of people have read about conflict resolution and know most of the above tips when coming face to face with a problem. Create a few real-life scenarios that may happen in your organization and run through the scenarios with your staff and supervisors to see how they use the above tips to resolve issues.